



## Syndicalism

These Generic Courses are designed for self-organised Freirean study circles, meeting on a regular weekly basis with no outside lecturer. So there is a main text for each week. This week, our main text has been “**Worker Solidarity and Unions**” from MIA, combined with Procedure of Meetings, based on Wal Hannington’s “**Mr Chairman**”. An introduction to these texts was sent out under the heading “**Vanguard**”.

As well as a main text each week, there is usually one, or more than one, supporting text, which may be regarded as supplementary, alternative, or additional reading. This week the supporting text to this discussion of the workers’ mass organisations and their necessary counterpart, the revolutionary Party, is made up of extracts from Lenin’s “[What is to be Done?](#)” (attached; download linked below)

*“Demagogues are the worst enemies of the working class”, wrote Lenin, in this book.*

## Workerism

In “What is to be Done?”, Lenin was concerned to oppose what he called “economism”, which is also called “syndicalism” and in South Africa in the past and still up to now, “workerism”.

Lenin was concerned to show (following the publication of Eduard Bernstein’s gradualist “[Evolutionary Socialism](#)” and Rosa Luxemburg’s “[Reform or Revolution?](#)”) that a revolutionary transformation of society was not possible without a professional, revolutionary, political party of the working class. Trade union organisation of the working class was never going to be sufficient.

In the process Lenin was moved to denounce demagogy in the severest terms (see the quote above, which is taken from the text that we are using today). One reason that Lenin denounced demagogues so emphatically is because they misrepresent themselves as being “left” or revolutionary, when in fact they are “right”, and in particular gradualist, reformist and class-collaborationist.

## Worker’s Control?

Sometimes syndicalism arrives at a point where it proposes, demagogically, “worker’s control” under capitalism. Marx and Lenin both denounced such tomfoolery – see, for example, Marx’s “[Critique of the Gotha Programme](#)”

Lenin showed that the worker's political party, the communist party, remains a "must-have". To achieve its goals the working class must combine in a vast association of the whole nation; whereas the syndicalism of individual factories or isolated mines is nothing more than a reversion to petty-bourgeois consciousness, in conditions where such petty-bourgeois behaviour is hopelessly subordinated to a bourgeois market that it cannot possibly control.

How will they sell their products, unless on the terms of the Imperialists? This is why we say that demagoguery is nothing but the class enemy's message, dressed up and re-sold in fake-revolutionary clothes. Demagogues will even be found denouncing the real revolutionaries as fakes.

When in doubt about such things, it helps to study; and Lenin is a good person to study, because he was good at telling the difference between genuine things, and fakes. Especially, Lenin opposed syndicalism, workerism, gradualism, reformism and economism, all of which still exist today.

"What is to be Done?" is the book where Lenin most clearly differentiated the reformist mass organisations from the vanguard political party of the working class, which is the communist party. The downloadable file contains the most directly relevant passages.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [What is to be Done, Workers and Revolutionaries, Lenin.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)